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ABSTRACT

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RUNNING HEAD: DOUBLY DAMNED

# Doubly Damned: What Happens When Students Are Suspended From School For The Remainder Of The Year

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## Abstract

During the 1995-96 school year, 425 middle and high school students in one school district received suspensions for the remainder of the school year from their regular schools. In an exploratory, follow-up investigation of outcomes for these students in the 1996-97 year, three groups were identified: one group of 109 students who were allowed to enroll at alternative learning centers (ALC); one group of 158 students who had the choice to attend these centers but did not enroll; and one group of 158 students who were prohibited from enrolling at the ALCs. An analysis of how these groups compared found that those who attended the ALCs returned the next year to enroll in regular schools at a significantly higher rate than students in either of the other groups. One subset of ALC students—those dismissed from the program before the year was out—fared especially poorly in the 1996-97 year.

## Introduction

The National School Safety Center (1991) indicates alternative schools for disruptive and at-risk youth will grow through the 1990s. A review of the literature identifies reports which describe effective alternative schools (Schoenlein, 1994; Stevens, Tullis, Sanchez & Gonzalez, 1991; Swanson & Williams-Robertson, 1990); however, few reports conduct follow-up evaluations with students after they leave an alternative school program. This report describes the results of a follow-up study conducted in the fall of the 1996-97 school year for students who participated in three Alternative Learning Centers (ALC) operated in the Wake County Public School System. This report is an exploratory investigation into the circumstances and outcomes for the ALC program and participating students.

In the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS), three Alternative Learning Centers (ALCs) were established in the fall of 1995. The ALCs were designed to allow students with long-term (LT) suspensions a way to earn academic credit while they were banned for the remainder of the school year from all regular school campuses and activities. Students eligible to enroll at an ALC could be LT suspended for any violation with the exception of firearm(s) on campus, and sale or distribution of a controlled substance such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or ritalin. All students with LT suspensions, regardless of whether they enrolled at an ALC or not, could reenroll at a regular school the next school year.

The ALC programs were housed on three WCPSS campuses, and classes were held after regular school hours. One middle school ALC served students in grades 6-8 from all 19 WCPSS middle schools. One high school ALC served students in grades 9-12 from seven WCPSS high schools, and a second high school ALC served students in grades 9-12 from the remaining six WCPSS high schools.

After a student received a LT suspension, procedures for enrollment at an ALC followed a sequence: a) school administrators determined that a student was or was not eligible to enroll in an ALC; b) eligible students and parents/guardians were encouraged to initiate contact with their designated ALC site and request to enroll; and c) the student and parents/guardians met with ALC staff members who retained final authority over whether to enroll a student (except in instances where the student had been assigned to the ALC by the superintendent or school board). Students were required to provide their own transportation to and from the ALC. One hundred ten students applied, and all but one of the students were accepted. The one student who was not accepted indicated in words and attitude that she didn't want to attend the school.

Instructional programs at the ALC sites differed from those at the regular schools. Classes were very small, typically averaging 4-8 students; teachers provided students with considerable individualized attention; and the core math, science, English, and social studies courses were emphasized. There were some instances in which students did not take all four core courses. Typically, these were cases where a decision was made by the student and ALC staff members to concentrate efforts on one or a few courses in an attempt to earn a passing grade. This practice became more common late in the school year.

The first students to be enrolled entered the ALCs in September 1995. The ALCs were closed to enrollment after May 10, 1966. ALC staff members kept records of student attendance and grades, and communicated this information to the students' home school where the students' official records were maintained.

## Method

The WCPSS Evaluation and Research Department conducted an evaluation of the ALC program for the 1995-96 school year (Carruthers, Baenen, Prohm, Johnson, Dulaney, Reher &

Stocks, 1996). The data that are reported herein were collected from the Carruthers et. al. study, and from student records maintained on the WCPSS mainframe computer database. The population studied in this investigation was all students with LT suspensions in the 1995-96 year.

With a large school system with many administrative layers, and a retrospective study of this sort, there is sometimes confusion about past events and student records. In situations where it was uncertain whether a LT suspension was administered, the case was dropped from all of the analyses. Fortunately, there were only seven instances of this out of a total of 425 student cases that Carruthers et. al. reported receiving suspensions in the 1995-96 year. In other situations where there was confusing information for specific variables, the many computer screens available for a student on the mainframe computer were exhaustively searched in an effort to clear up the confusion, and it was usually the case that answers could be found, but if not, the variable in question was coded as missing data.

Being exploratory in nature, formal hypotheses were not established in this study; however, statistical analyses were conducted, and a .05 significance level was used to indicate where there may be instances of true differences in the data. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages, nonparametric statistics such as $\chi^2$, Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA, and Friedman's two-way ANOVA, and the parametric, one-way ANOVA for repeated measures were used in the data analyses. Statistical analyses were conducted with options available in GB-STAT (v. 5.3) and Microsoft Excel (v. 7.0) software packages.

## Results

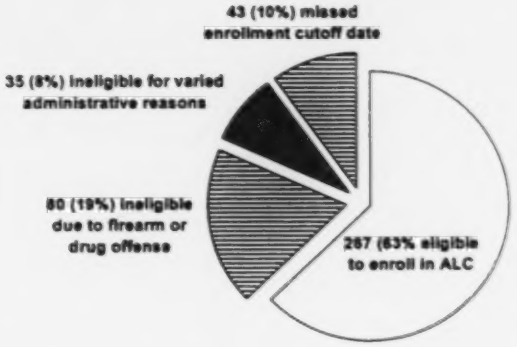
The results are organized in three sections. Section I reviews the history and characteristics of the ALC students in the 1995-96 year. Section II reports on student outcomes measured in the 1996-97 year for students who participated in the ALCs. Section III compares

students who participated in the ALC program to two other groups of students who also had LT suspensions in the 1995-96 school year.

Section I

There were 425 WCPSS students who received LT suspensions in the 1995-96 year (Carruthers, et. al., 1996). Of this number, 80 students were ineligible to participate in the ALC program because their suspensions involved possession of a firearm (3) or sale or distribution of a controlled substance (77); 43 students were ineligible because their suspensions began after the May 10, 1996, cutoff date for enrolling; and 35 students were ineligible to participate due to a variety of administrative reasons. There was a total of 158 students with LT suspensions who were ineligible to participate in the ALC program. This group did not have the choice of enrolling at an ALC, and will be compared to ALC students in Section III.

Figure 1. Eligibility of 425 Students with LT Suspensions for ALC Program


43 (10%) missed enrollment cutoff date
35 (8%) ineligible for varied administrative reasons
80 (19%) ineligible due to firearm or drug offense
267 (63% eligible to enroll in ALC

Of the 267 students who were eligible to enroll at an ALC, 158 students with the choice to enroll did not exercise this option. This group with the choice to enroll at an ALC but who did not exercise their option is the second group that will be compared to the ALC students in Section III.



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The information and tables in Section I describe various characteristics of the 109 students who enrolled in the ALCs (Carruthers, et. al., 1996). Table 1 reveals that nearly all (93.5%) of the enrolled middle school students finished the school year in the ALC program, while about half of the high school students (48.7%) did so. A total of 36 students were dismissed from the ALC program for disciplinary reasons. The 36 students who were dismissed from the ALC are unique among the 425 students with LT suspensions in that they were dismissed from WCPSS schools twice in the same year. These students were doubly damned.

Table 1. Enrollment at the ALCs: 1995-96

| ALC Site | Eligible to Enroll | Enrolled at ALC | Changed ALC* | Rsgnd# | Dsmsd+ | Dropped Out | Completed ALC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Middle School Site | 65 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 29 |
| High School Site 1 | 96 | 48 | (-1) | 0 | 24 | 1 | 22 |
| High School Site 2 | 106 | 30 | (+1) | 1 | 11 | 3 | 16 |
| **Totals** | **267** | **109** | **0** | **1** | **36** | **5** | **67** |

Notes: * One student moved and transferred ALC locations.
# One student was reassigned (Rsgnd) to regular school by the school board.
+ Thirty-six students were dismissed (Dsmsd) from the ALCs for disciplinary reasons.

Table 2 shows that students who enrolled at the ALCs did so at different times throughout the school year. No middle school students enrolled in the first quarter of the year.

Table 2. Quarter When Students Enrolled in the ALCs

| ALC Site | n | First Quarter* | Second Quarter* | Third Quarter* | Fourth Quarter* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Middle School Site | 31 | -- | 13 (42%) | 9 (29%) | 9 (29%) |
| High School Site #1** | 47 | 7 (15%) | 11 (23%) | 16 (34%) | 13 (28%) |
| High School Site #2** | 31 | 9 (29%) | 6 (19%) | 12 (39%) | 4 (13%) |

Notes: * The first quarter is defined as days 0-45; the second quarter as 46-90; the third quarter as 91-135; and the fourth quarter as 136 through the end of the school year.
** One student who transferred from high school site #1 is accounted for at site #2.

Table 3 indicates that almost half of the students (47.7%) were actively enrolled at the middle and high school ALCs for a period of nine weeks or fewer. Active membership at the ALCs reached a peak of 69 students on April 24, 1996.

Table 3. Weeks Students Participated in the ALCs

| ALC Site | n | 1-9 Weeks | 10-18 Weeks | 19-27 Weeks | 28-36 Weeks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Middle School | 31 | 9 (29%) | 7 (23%) | 15 (48%) | -- |
| High School Site 1* | 47 | 31 (66%) | 10 (21%) | 4 (9%) | 2 (4%) |
| High School Site 2* | 31 | 12 (39%) | 9 (29%) | 4 (13%) | 6 (19%) |
| **Totals** | **109** | **52 (47.7%)** | **26 (23.9%)** | **23 (21.1%)** | **8 (7.3%)** |

Note: * One student who transferred from high school site 1 to site 2 is accounted for at site 2.

Table 4 reveals reasons for suspension by race and gender of student. Among the Caucasian students, 23 (42.6%) were suspended for alcohol and drug offenses. Among the African-American students, 25 (46.3%) were suspended for fighting or assault offenses.

Table 4. Policy Violations by Gender and Race Among ALC Students

| Policy Violation | Black Male | Black Female | White Male | White Female | Asian | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6000: Attendance | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | | **12** (11%) |
| 6400: Student Conduct | 5 | | 3 | | | **8** (7%) |
| 6410: Student Behavior | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | **4** (4%) |
| 6420: Disruption | 3 | 1 | | 2 | | **6** (6%) |
| 6425: Fighting / Assault | 17 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 1 female | **33** (30%) |
| 6427: Weapons | 2 | 1 | 9 | 1 | | **13** (12%) |
| 6428: Theft / Damage | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | **4** (4%) |
| 6429: Drugs / Alcohol | 6 | | 16 | 7 | | **29** (27%) |
| **Totals** | **40** (37%) | **14** (13%) | **39** (36%) | **15** (14%) | **1** (1%) | **109** |

Table 5 shows that the ALC students were dispersed across all grades, 6-12. Ninth grade students comprised 40% of all those with LT suspensions, and the majority (71.6%) of students were in grades 8-10.

Table 5. Grade Level by Gender and Race Among ALC Students

| Grade | Black Male | Black Female | White Male | White Female | Asian | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sixth | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 (5%) |
| Seventh | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 8 (7%) |
| Eighth | 5 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 18 (17%) |
| Ninth | 18 | 8 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 44 (40%) |
| Tenth | 5 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 female | 16 (15%) |
| Eleventh | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 11 (10%) |
| Twelfth | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 7 (6%) |
| **Totals** | **40** | **14** | **39** | **15** | **1** | **109** |

Table 6 indicates that 16 of the ALC students were students with exceptional needs, including academically gifted, learning disabled, behaviorally/emotionally handicapped, and other health impaired categories. Over half (56.3%) of this group were learning disabled students.

Table 6. Exceptionality by Gender and Race Among ALC Students

| Exceptionality | Black Male | Black Female | White Male | White Female | Totals* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academically Gifted | -- | -- | 5 | -- | 5 (31%) |
| Learning Disabled | 4 | 1 | 4 | -- | 9 (56%) |
| Behaviorally/Emotionally Handicapped | 1 | -- | -- | -- | 1 (6%) |
| Other Health Impaired | -- | -- | -- | 1 | 1 (6%) |
| **Totals** | **5 (31%)** | **1 (6%)** | **9 (56%)** | **1 (6%)** | **16** |

Note: * Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding error.

There were 42 (58.3%) of the 78 high school ALC students who earned some units of academic credit while at the ALC. Table 7 shows how many credits these students earned.

Table 7. Units of Academic Credit Earned by ALC Students

| ALC Site | n | Units of Academic Credit | | | | | | | | | | Total Units of Credit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 0.5 | 1.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 5.0 | 6.0 | |
| High School Site 1 | 26 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 1 | -- | 1 | 69 |
| High School Site 2 | 16 | -- | 1 | -- | 2 | -- | 1 | -- | 5 | -- | 1 | 6 | 69 |
| **Total Students** | **42** | **2** | **5** | **2** | **5** | **3** | **3** | **2** | **11** | **1** | **1** | **7** | **138** |

Nineteen of the 31 middle school students were promoted to the next grade at the end of the year, but promotions for 10 students were withheld pending completion of summer school. Not counting the 10 middle school students whose promotions were withheld, a crude indication of academic success for all ALC students is that 61 (56.0%) of the 109 middle and high school ALC students achieved some academic progress through their participation in the program.

Section II

Three indicators are assessed as outcomes in the follow-up study of the ALC students: a) how many of the 109 students returned to enroll in WCPSS for the 1996-97 year; b) how many short-term (ST) and LT suspensions returning students had accumulated through December 21, 1996; and c) what grades returning students had earned in the first quarter of the 1996-97 year. One of the 109 ALC students was lost from analyses at this point because the student's entire record disappeared from the WCPSS mainframe computer database.

Of the 108 cases analyzed, Table 8 indicates that four students had graduated and 77 of the remaining 104 students returned to enroll for the 1996-97 year as of December 20, 1997. Of the 27 students who did not return to enroll, 19 had turned age 16 by the start of the school year, and they may have dropped out of school. It is unknown whether the eight students who had not yet turned 16 enrolled in some other school district.

Table 8. Enrollment in 1996-97 for 108 ALC Students

| | Gender | | Race | | | Age* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Status in WCPSS | Female | Male | African-American | Caucasian | Other | Under 16 | 16 or Older |
| Enrolled | 16 | 61 | 41 | 35 | 1 | 49 | 28 |
| Not Enrolled | 10 | 17 | 12 | 15 | -- | 8 | 19 |
| Graduated | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | -- | -- | 4 |
| **Totals** | **28** | **80** | **54** | **53** | **1** | **47** | **61** |

Note: * Age was determined as of the first day of the 1996-97 school year: August 20, 1996

Table 9 shows that 39 (50.6%) of the 77 returning students had received one or more ST suspensions in the 1996-97 year as of December 20, 1996. These 39 students had a total of 72 ST suspensions for a total of 232 days. As a group, the 77 students averaged 0.94 ST suspensions per student, and 3.0 days of suspension per student. Also, there were six LT suspensions among the 77 returning students.

Table 9. Short-term Suspensions in 1996-97 for 77 Returning ALC Students

| Variable | No Incidents | 1 Incident | 2 Incidents | 3 Incidents | 4 Incidents |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of students | 38 | 20 | 8 | 8 | 3 |
| Number of days served | -- | 83 | 47 | 76 | 26 |

Among the 77 returning students, there were 75 who had grades for the first quarter of the 1996-97 year. Twenty-two of these students had no failing grades (Fs), while the other 53 students had one or more Fs for the quarter. Table 10 shows how the 75 students' percentage of Fs to courses enrolled were distributed.

Table 10. Distribution for Percentage of Fs Among Returning ALC Students

| | Percentage of Fs | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | 0% | 1-33% | 34-67% | 68-100% |
| Number of Students | 22 | 19 | 16 | 18 |

Among the ALC students, a comparison of those who completed the program with those who were dismissed from the program finds that the dismissed students fared especially poorly in the 1996-97 year. There were 67 students who completed the program (four of whom graduated), and 41 students who were dismissed for disciplinary reasons—the doubly damned of our title in that they were essentially LT suspended twice in the same year. Table 11 shows how these two subsets compared on the outcome variables.

Table 11. Comparison of Two Subsets of ALC Students

| | 1996-97 Enrollment (Enrld) | | | ST Suspension Incidents (Incdts) and Days Served | | | Percentage Fs | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subset | n | Enrld | Not Enrld | n | Avg Incdts per Student | Average Days per Student | n | 0% | 1 to 33% | 34 to 67% | 68 to 100% |
| Completers | 63 | 56 88.9% | 7 11.1% | 56 | 0.66 | 2.39 | 55 | 20 36.4% | 14 25.5% | 11 20.0% | 10 18.2% |
| Dismissed | 36 | 19 52.8% | 17 47.2% | 19 | 1.79 | 4.63 | 18 | 3 16.7% | 3 16.7% | 5 27.8% | 7 38.9% |

Among the 56 ALC students who completed the program and returned to enroll in the 1996-97 year, three students (5.4%) had again been LT suspended as of December 20, 1996. Among the 21 ALC students who were dismissed from the program and returned to enroll the next year, three of these students (14.3%) had also been LT suspended by December 20, 1996.

## Section III

In this section, we compare the students who participated in the ALC with the two other groups of students with LT suspensions in the 1995-96 year: a) one group of 158 students who did not have the choice to enroll in an ALC, designated the Without Choice group, and b) another group of 158 students who could enroll but did not do so, designated the With Choice group. Six student cases in the first of these groups were dropped from all analyses due to being unable to reliably establish if their LT suspensions in the 1995-96 year were enforced. This section has two parts: the first part compares how similar or dissimilar the three groups were prior to their receiving a LT suspension in the 1995-96 year, and the second part compares how similar or dissimilar the groups were upon follow-up in 1996-97.

Comparing Three Groups for Similarity Before LT Suspension

The three groups—ALC, Without Choice, and With Choice—can be compared on a number of demographic variables. Data on demographic variables collected in the fall 1996 include grade level for the 1995-96 year (middle versus high school), lunch status (free or reduced versus full pay), race (minority versus Caucasian), and reason for LT suspension (violent offense versus other). Results of these comparisons are that the 3 x 2 chi-square computations for grade level and lunch status were not significant at the .05 level, but race and reason for LT suspension were significant at this level. Table 12 reports these numbers, and Figures 2 and 3 depict the distributions for race and reason for LT suspension.

Table 12. Comparison of Three Groups on Four Variables

| | | 1995-96 Grade Level | | Lunch Status | | Race | | Reason for LT Suspension | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | n | Middle School | High School | Free or Redcd | Full Pay | Mnrty | Caucn | Violnt Offnse | Other |
| Without Choice | 152 | 42 (27.6%) | 110 (72.4%) | 46 (30.3%) | 106 (69.7%) | 78 (51.3%) | 74 (48.7%) | 36 (23.7%) | 116 (76.3%) |
| With Choice | 158 | 34 (21.5%) | 124 (78.5%) | 59 (37.3%) | 99 (62.7%) | 101 (63.9%) | 57 (36.1%) | 57 (63.9%) | 101 (36.1%) |
| ALC | 108 | 30 (27.8%) | 78 (72.2%) | 33 (30.6%) | 75 (69.4%) | 55 (50.9%) | 53 (49.1%) | 46 (42.6%) | 62 (57.4%) |
| Statistical Analysis | | $\chi^2 = 1.97943$ df = 2 p = .37168 | | $\chi^2 = 2.15341$ df = 2 p = .34072 | | $\chi^2 = 6.50772$ df = 2 p = .03862 | | $\chi^2 = 11.08199$ df = 2 p = .00392 | |

Regarding race, chi-square analyses of the three possible pairings between groups indicate that the group With Choice differed significantly from each of the other two groups; the latter two groups did not significantly differ. Regarding reason for suspension, chi-square analyses of the pairings between groups indicate that the group Without Choice differed significantly from each of the other two groups; the latter two groups did not significantly differ.

Figure 2. Comparison of Three Groups for Race of Students

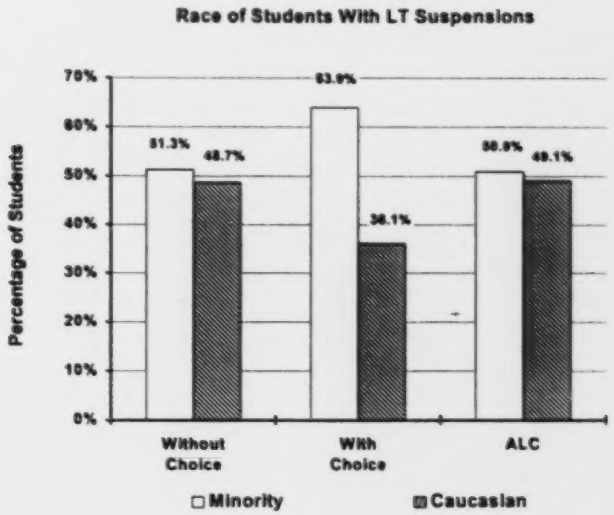
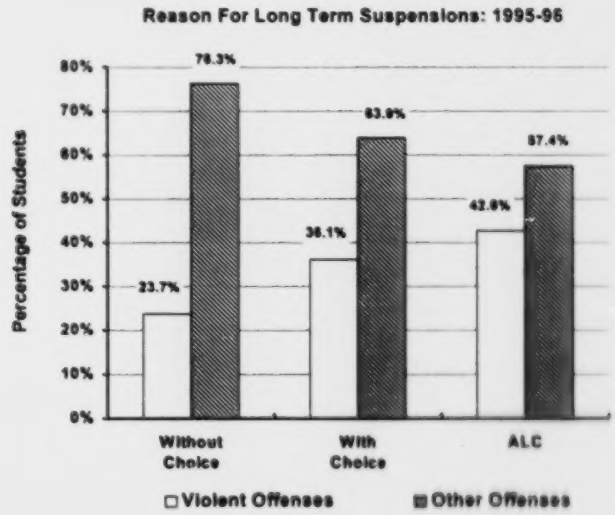



Figure 3. Comparison of Three Groups for Reason for LT Suspension




Students' performance on the Otis-Lennon Scholastic Aptitude Test (OLSAT) was another variable available to compare groups. In the WCPSS, the OLSAT is administered in 2nd grade and again in 5th grade. All of the students in the three groups did not have OLSAT scores,

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but the variable could still be useful to provide a crude indication of how the groups compared with respect to academic aptitude. Using the most recent OLSAT scores, there was not a significant difference among the three groups for students with scores. Table 13 reports the range, means and standard deviations on the OLSAT for these groups.

Table 13. Comparison Among Three Groups on the OLSAT

| Group | n | Range | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Without Choice | 77 | 65 to 150 | 93.9 | 16.8 |
| With Choice | 92 | 62 to 141 | 92.8 | 15.2 |
| ALC | 68 | 55 to 150 | 96.6 | 17.7 |
| Statistical Analysis | One-Way ANOVA F-Ratio = 1.0462; df = 2; p = .3529 | | | |

Another variable on which academic aptitude for students in the three groups may be compared was their performance on end-of-grade (EOG) tests that are administered statewide in grades 3-8. Again, not all students had EOG scores. The scoring procedure for these tests allows students' performance to be characterized as proficient or not proficient, suggesting students are at or above grade level (proficient) or below grade level (not proficient). Using the most recent EOG scores for cases where students had both a reading and math score, 3 x 2 chi-square analyses found that there were no significant differences among the three groups for reading or math. Table 14 reports this data.

Table 14. Comparisons Among Three Groups on the End-of-Grade Examinations

| Group | n | EOG Reading | | EOG Mathematics | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Not Proficient | Proficient | Not Proficient | Proficient |
| Without Choice | 100 | 50 (50%) | 50 (50%) | 46 (46%) | 54 (54%) |
| With Choice | 121 | 67 (55.4%) | 54 (44.6%) | 67 (55.4%) | 54 (44.6%) |
| ALC | 81 | 43 (53.1%) | 38 (46.9%) | 41 (50.6%) | 40 (49.4%) |
| Statistical Analysis | | $\chi^2 = 0.6347$<br>df = 2<br>p = .7281 | | $\chi^2 = 1.9306$<br>df = 2<br>p = .3809 | |

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In summary, setting a significance level at $p <= .05$, comparisons of the three groups found that:

- there was no significant difference among the groups for grade level;
- there was no significant difference among the groups for lunch status;
- there was no significant difference among the groups for the OLSAT;
- there was no significant difference among the groups for the EOG reading examination; and
- there was no significant difference among the groups for the EOG math examination; but
- there was a significant difference among the groups for race ( $p < .05$); and
- there was a significant difference among the groups for reason for suspension ($p < .01$).

Comparing Three Groups for Student Outcomes

The variables used in the follow-up study of ALC students can also be used to compare whether outcomes for the three groups of students differed in the 1996-97 year. One approach to this analysis of three groups is to compare data sets for the 1996-97 year, while another approach is to compare changes in data sets between the 1994-95 and 1996-97 years. In either approach, it was necessary to have cases where students were in continuous enrollment over a constant period of time. In the first approach, students selected for analyses were in continuous enrollment from the first of the 1996-97 year through December 20, 1996. In the second approach, students selected for analyses were those in continuous enrollment for the whole of the 1994-95 year, as well as the 1996-97 year through December 20, 1996.

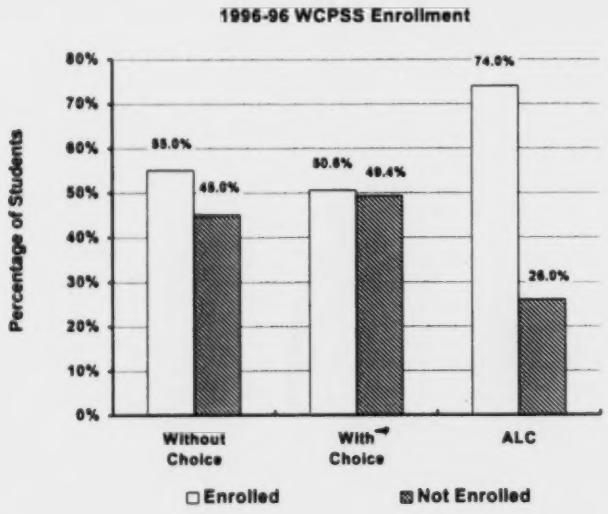
First Approach. By the first approach, comparing the three groups for enrollment in the 1996-97 year (not counting students who had graduated), a chi-square analysis is significant. Chi-square analyses of the three possible pairings between groups indicate that the ALC group

had a significantly greater proportion of returning students than either other group as depicted in Table 15 and Figure 4; the latter two groups did not significantly differ.

Table 15. Enrollment for Three Groups in 1996-97

| Group | Enrolled | Not Enrolled |
|---|---|---|
| Without Choice | 82 (55.0%) | 67 (45.0%) |
| With Choice | 80 (50.6%) | 78 (49.4%) |
| ALC | 77 (74.0%) | 27 (26.0%) |
| Statistical Analysis | $\chi^2 = 15.0517$; df = 2; p = .0005 | |

Figure 4. WCPSS Enrollment in the 1996-97 Year for Three Groups of Students



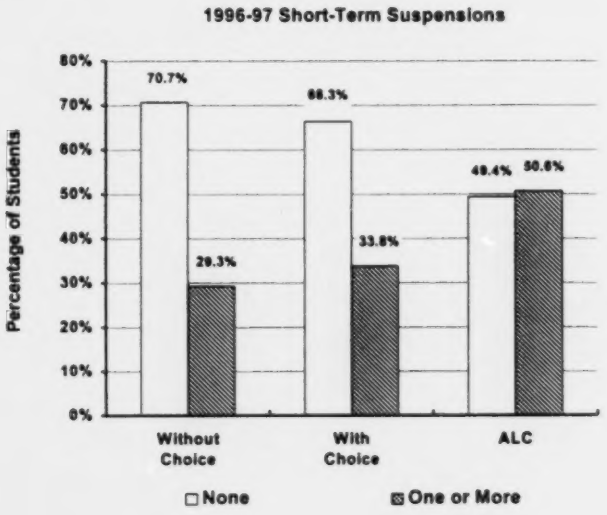

Comparing the three groups for short term suspensions in the 1996-97 year, a chi-square analysis is significant. Chi-square analyses of the three possible pairings between groups indicate the ALC group had a significantly greater proportion of students with suspensions than either other group as depicted in Table 16 and Figure 5; the latter two groups did not significantly differ

Table 16. Short Term Suspensions for Three Groups in 1996-97

| Group | No ST Suspensions | One or More ST Suspensions |
|---|---|---|
| Without Choice | 58 (70.7%%) | 24 (29.3%%) |
| With Choice* | 53 (66.3%) | 27 (33.8%) |
| ALC | 38 (49.4%) | 39 (50.6%) |
| Statistical Analysis | $\chi^2 = 8.5146$; df = 2; p =.0142 | |

Note * Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding error

Figure 5. Suspensions in 1996-97 for Three Groups of Students




Comparing the three groups for days served on suspension, a Kruskal-Wallis analysis was not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.1852$, df = 2, p = .1234). A Kruskal-Wallis analysis was also not significant comparing the three groups for percentage Fs ($\chi^2 = 1.4924$; df = 2; p = .4742).

Second Approach. By the second approach, students in the three groups may be compared for changes in percentage Fs, number of suspensions, and days served on suspension between the two years, 1994-95 and 1996-97. Suspensions and days served on suspension in the 1996-97 year were prorated for the full year to make these numbers comparable to those in the

1994-95 year. Table 17. indicates that Friedman's two-way ANOVA by ranks was not significant for any of the groups on 9 of the 9 analyses.

Table 17. Comparisons for Three Groups Between Two Years

| | Change Between 1994-95 and 1996-97 Years | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group** | **n** | **Percentage of Fs** | **n** | **Number of ST Suspensions** | **n** | **Number of Days on ST Suspension** |
| Without Choice | 54 | Chi-square = 0.9074<br>df = 1<br>p = .3408 | 68 | Chi-square = 0.0588<br>df = 1<br>p = .8084 | 68 | Chi-square = 0<br>df = 1<br>p = 1 |
| With Choice | 45 | Chi-square = 1.4222<br>df = 1<br>p = .2330 | 64 | Chi-square = 2.25<br>df = 1<br>p = .1336 | 64 | Chi-square = 3.5156<br>df = 1<br>p = .0608 |
| ALC | 61 | Chi-square = 0.5902<br>df = 1<br>p = .4424 | 69 | Chi-square = 0.2319<br>df = 1<br>p = .6301 | 69 | Chi-square = 0.2319<br>df = 1<br>p = .6301 |

## Discussion

In a follow-up study of this nature, the basic questions one seeks to address are:1) how the students are doing now in the present, and 2) whether the intervention—in this case, the ALC program--did them any good. The first of these two questions is relatively easy to answer. Most (71.3%) of the students who participated in the ALC program returned to enroll in the WCPSS for the 1996-97 year, but they continued to evidence behavioral and academic difficulties. Behavioral difficulties were apparent for the half (50.6%) of the returning students who had received one or more short-term suspensions in the first half of the year, and academic difficulties were apparent for the almost half (45.3%) of the students who had failing grades in a third or more of their first quarter courses. Thirty-six students who were dismissed from the ALC in the 1995-96 year for disciplinary reasons fared especially poorly the next year: compared to ALC students who completed the program, fewer dismissed students returned to enroll; they

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had a higher incidence of disciplinary problems; and they had a higher incidence of failing grades.

The second of these questions is much more difficult to answer in a retrospective study; however, some insights can be gained through comparisons of the ALC group with the other two groups. Data that was available for students in each of these groups suggest that the groups are reasonably comparable. The distribution of students in middle school and high school grades was comparable among the three groups, as were socioeconomic status (indicated by lunch status) and academic aptitude (indicated by the OLSAT and EOG scores). The reason for the difference among groups for race, with the With Choice group having a higher proportion of minority students, can't be known but it may have had some bearing on why such a high proportion of this group did not choose to enroll in an ALC. In contrast, the significant difference among the groups for the nature of their LT suspension does have a known reason; over 70 of the students in the Without Choice were LT suspended as a result of a single drug bust in the fall 1995. None of these students were allowed to enroll in the ALC program, thus accounting for why the Without Choice group had a disproportionate number of nonviolent offenses.

In that this retrospective investigation did not have the luxury of randomly assigning students to groups, it is impressive that the three groups were as comparable as they were found to be. With the three groups having a measure of comparability before operation of the ALC program, then differences that are evident among the groups in the 1996-97 year after the ALC program might help to address the question of whether the ALC program benefited participating students above or beyond what students in the other two groups experienced.



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With the comparisons that were drawn among groups in the 1996-97 year, it is encouraging to note that the ALC group had a significantly greater proportion of students returning to enroll in the WCPSS than either of the other groups. This finding is consistent with a number of authors who indicate alternative schools have good success with helping students to make academic progress (Heger, 1992; Stevens, et. al., 1991; Yagi, 1985). The opportunity or lack of opportunity to be promoted or continue earning course credits in the 1995-96 year may have singularly affected many students' decision whether to return (or not) to the WCPSS.

On a less positive note, there were no significant differences in academic success, indicated by percentage Fs, whether comparing the three groups in the 1996-97 year or comparing changes within groups over two years. Whether students participated in the ALC program or not, it doesn't appear to have made any difference in their success with earning passing grades in the first quarter of the next year.

Regarding suspension incidents, the comparison among groups in the 1996-97 year shows that the ALC group had a greater proportion of students with one or more suspensions than in either other group, but the Freidman analyses for matched subjects in each group over two years showed that there was no significant change in number of suspension incidents for any of the groups. Regarding days of suspension served, there was no significant difference among groups in the 1996-97 year, and there were no significant changes in the groups between the 1994-95 and 1996-97 years. None of the groups appears to have changed for the better or the worse over time; however, in a back-handed fashion, it would be something of a compliment to the ALC program if it is true that it had an effect of drawing even behaviorally troubled students back to school.

The benefit of the ALC program to students who participated compared to those who did not, appears to be chiefly that the program possibly influenced a greater proportion of students to stay in school than in either of the comparison groups. Students in the Without Choice group were denied the opportunity to be so influenced, and students in the With Choice group did not take advantage of this opportunity. The ALC program does not appear to have made any difference in academic performance or problem behavior resulting in school suspension during at least the interval over which this follow-up study was conducted--the first half of the next school year following participation in the ALC program. It remains to be seen whether the limited benefit of encouraging students to stay in school may last any longer or other benefits may yet appear.

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